

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Ephraim Middle School
555 South 100 East
Ephraim, Utah 84627**

November 19-20, 2003



Utah State Office of Education
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**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Ephraim Middle School
555 South 100 East
Ephraim, Utah 84627**

November 19-20, 2003

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, November 19-20, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Ephraim Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Kent Larsen is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Ephraim Middle School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Ephraim Middle School.

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10/30/03

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R. Paul Gottfredson.....	Business Administrator
Donald Hill.....	Assistant Superintendent
Analee Knudsen	Supervisor School Lunch

EPHRAIM MIDDLE SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Kent Larsen Principal
Lynn Willardsen Assistant Principal

Counseling

Sharon Meacham Counselor

Support Staff

Tawnya Olsen Financial Secretary
Sandra Cox Attendance Secretary
Ann Olson Lunch Secretary
Linda Budd “Gear-Up” Coordinator
Martha Olsen Special Education
Fred Taukei’aho Special Education
Shelly Braithwaite CBRC
April Christensen Library Media Specialist

Faculty

Laurie Allen	Ron Litteral	George Richardson
Eileen Anderson	Randy Mellor	Lisa Schlueter
Jeff Bartholomew	Erin Miller	Valen Scott
Sheri Barton	Michael Moon	Tracy Simonson
Tim Black	James Nelson	Shannon Sorensen
Jeanne Brady	Marcea Nielson	Barbara Wintch
Dean Halling	Vickie Olson	

Para-Educators

Elnora Carroll	Fawn Miller	
Charity Gardner	GayDene Montoya	Ron Squire
Sandi Jonson	Amanad Olson	Susan Williams

Custodial Staff

Tyler Alder

Cody Lyons

Lloyd Lyons

Roger Peterson

Cooks

Sandra Bown

Mary Lee Hermansen

Marion Lemon

Joy Lyons

Denise Thursby

EPHRAIM MIDDLE SCHOOL
MISSION AND BELIEF STATEMENTS

MOTTO

Prepare Today

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Ephraim Middle School is to provide a quality educational experience to all students which will increase their academic abilities and talents, empower them to lead a productive life, and enable them to contribute to society.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We Believe:

- Parental support and involvement in the educational system is a key factor to the success of Ephraim Middle School.
- Teachers will support and collaborate with each other both professionally and socially.
- Every student experiences success.
- Students are accountable and responsible for their actions.
- Students are exposed to a variety of educational and social experiences.
- A caring and respectful environment creates a positive and safe atmosphere.
- All students have the right to learn without interference from others.

VISITING TEAM REPORT
EPHRAIM MIDDLE SCHOOL
CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

In 1980, as a new Manti High School neared completion, members of the South Sanpete School Board seriously considered the idea of establishing an independent school for the middle grades in the Manti-Ephraim area. The new high school would be nearly full to capacity with students in grades 9 through 12. The decision was made to establish an independent “middle school.” To maintain political equality, the location of the new middle school would be in Ephraim. The school was established and began operating in the fall of 1980. Originally the new middle school occupied the old high school building in Manti, with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students from both Manti and Ephraim. In 1983 a building lot was secured, and by 1984 the building was under construction. Delays and setbacks plagued the completion but finally, with the help of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and the community, the school moved from Manti to Ephraim in just over one week in January of 1985.

Located in almost the geographic center of the state, Ephraim Middle School has seen a slow but steady increase in enrollment, with students coming from the communities of Ephraim, Manti, and Sterling. The student body is predominantly white with just over 10 percent ethnic minority. The number of students on free (33 percent) and reduced-price (14 percent) lunch mirrors the number of families with below average incomes.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The Visiting Team commends Ephraim Middle School and its community for giving their efforts and commitment to the new accreditation process by taking a critical look at their school and the needs of their students.

The Ephraim Middle School self-study does an effective job of defining the community and student clientele. It shows the stability and homogeneity of the community. Data regarding student achievement is almost entirely focused on that derived from standardized testing. It accurately reflects student achievement in comparison with state and district norms.

The surveys provide valuable information regarding school climate and community support. There is general consensus among the staff, parents, and students that Ephraim Middle School is a “good school.”

As the school profile was being developed, information would be regularly shared with all stakeholders. There is clear evidence that there exists a positive and

productive working relationship among students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community members. The school creates and sustains a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging, as evidenced by the climate surveys and the increased parent involvement at SEOP nights.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

An effective school profile includes four components. This profile does include collection and management of the profile data and communication of the data with the school's stakeholders. To be complete, the Ephraim Middle School profile should also include the analysis and synthesis of data, as well as use of the data for school improvement planning. The National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) calls this an "Executive Summary."

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Disaggregate the data for all subgroups following current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.
- Determine what students are learning and how well they are learning, and complete an analysis of data in terms of how effectively student intervention programs are working for all students
- Develop an Executive Summary of the data to provide a narrative overview of the major findings, for the purpose of informing stakeholders of the direction the school will take to address student needs.
- The analysis of course grades, attendance, and discipline patterns should also be incorporated into the school's comprehensive profile, and then used for School Improvement Planning.
- Complete a further analysis of parent attendance at SEOP nights to disaggregate the attendance data for all subgroups.
- Include data specifically related to No Child Left Behind requirements as published by the Utah State Office of Education.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

In 2000, the administration invited selected staff, parents, students, and community representatives to develop a shared vision for student learning. Staff members were chosen to represent all departmental areas. Several members of the team were sent to workshops provided by the Utah Department of Education on the new School Accreditation process.

The first step in their process was to “look at our mission statement, [and] belief statement,” and complete a review of their previous five-year plan from 1995. After an analysis of that plan, the team concluded that “only a few items in our five-year plan were suitable for the new process.” There was no reference to whether or not the goals and objectives in the five-year plan were accomplished.

The school and community engaged in many meetings for the purpose of developing a shared vision for student learning that is stated in terms of desired results for student learning (DRSLs) and performance indicators.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The Visiting Team received a better picture of the school through interviewing members of the school community than from reading the self-study.

The self-study does not delve deeply enough into issues regarding teaching, learning, and overall student behavior and performance. It fails to give a clear picture of those students who might be “falling through the cracks.” For example, the profile did not disaggregate test scores, current grades, attendance factors, etc. for special education students, minorities, and other subcategories.

A general comment concerning “several home schooled students returned to public school” was made, but no supporting data was presented as to how many students are currently home taught or in private schools, and whether the numbers have declined or increased. No data identifying any trends or shifts in the demographics were included to support the opinion that students “returning to public school” had an impact on student performance.

It is recommended that the school explore data concerning student behavior, attendance and tardiness rates, and discipline (number and percentages of suspensions), and disaggregate this data for subgroups (e.g., ethnicity, gender, English proficiency, disability, parental educational levels, and participation in free and reduced-price lunch programs).

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Ephraim Middle School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Students are actively engaged in learning
2. Students are actively engaged in using current technology
3. Students are actively engaged in a variety of educational and social experiences while attending Ephraim Middle School

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Ephraim Middle School began working on the mission statement and belief statements in 1995. After becoming acquainted with the new accreditation process, the members of the team began to make modifications to bring the mission and beliefs into compliance with the accreditation requirements. Focus teams were used to compile information that was to be shared with the faculty and administration. Surveys and questionnaires were used to gather information from students, parents, and teachers. From this collaboration between people and information, the mission statement of Ephraim Middle School was refined to provide a sense of direction so that work could begin on the DRSLs.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

Ephraim Middle School has defined belief statements so that all stakeholders (student, parents, and staff) are responsible for the educational success of the students, although an emphasis is placed upon students being held accountable and responsible for their own actions. Parent support and involvement is also a key area of responsibility and accountability. Less apparent is where the accountability of staff members resides.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The belief statements need to address more clearly how students are to be actively engaged in learning and technology. The statements do, however, reflect a variety of learning and social experiences.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The Visiting Team observed by visiting within classrooms that teaching aligns with Utah State Core, and teachers who were questioned told the Visiting Team that they review CRTs and focus on areas that need reinforcement. The Visiting Team did not observe clearly defined scope, sequence, and mapping of the State Core posted within classrooms, but it is apparent that planning using the State Core Curriculum is in place.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The Visiting Team observed that, to the extent to which teachers collaborate using middle school philosophy and teaming, curriculum development follows established best practices and implements school DRSLs. In those areas of the school where collaboration is less apparent, the DRSLs are not being fully integrated across all subject areas. The relationship between the actual curriculum and the DRSLs seems to be somewhat fractured. The potential relationship between these guiding schoolwide learning results, the specific expectations of instruction in each discipline, and the services provided by each of the school's programs have not been fully explored.

For example, in the narrative description of the Process of Defining Desired Results for Student Learning for Ephraim Middle School, it is stated,

We also believe that everyone on the whole team has a vested interest in at least one of these DRSLs thereby giving responsibility and cohesion to the team and to the process as a whole.

This statement is a contradiction, since to achieve complete unity all DRSLs must be accepted and implemented by all stakeholders. "Once identified, this shared vision for student learning can provide students, staff, parents and the community with a clear sense of direction and unity of purpose in the education of students in your school" (NSSE, 2002).

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

The Visiting Team observed the following classroom instructional practices: lecture, discussion, guided questioning, and demonstration. In some classes students were working in groups or independently. Hands-on activities were utilized in music, wood shop, drama, and art. A limited amount of instruction that would stimulate higher-level thinking skills was observed. During discussions with various faculty members, projects were discussed that require higher-level skills, including the inquiry method. Many teachers reported using a variety of learning experiences, including those requiring higher-level thinking skills, but during the two-day visit the Visiting Team observed limited utilization of variety. The Visiting Team suggests the staff collectively research and expand the use of multiple teaching strategies in academic classes to meet the needs of all students.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

Teachers regularly offer individual help to struggling students. The Special Education Department is effective in tracking students and consulting and collaborating with teachers in all content areas to best meet the needs of students with special needs. Additional programs are in place to serve students of limited English ability. Many teachers differentiate their curricula to meet various students' needs.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

The school employs a variety of programs to support student learning in the regular classroom. Adult paraprofessionals assist teachers and students, reading and math tutors regularly work with students, after-school programs are provided for individual student help, and a part-time specialist is available to assist students of limited English ability. The Visiting Team observed effective use of paraprofessional help to assist the struggling learner. Instructional time at Ephraim Middle School is valued, and the structure of learning time reflects this.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or schoolwide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The expectations for student achievement and performance standards are not fully developed. In those cases where expectations of student learning are clearly defined, assessments of student learning are aligned with the essential knowledge, skills, and performance standards for student learning.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

The variety of assessments used at Ephraim Middle School covers essential knowledge and skills. There is periodic evidence of assessments that demonstrate higher-level thinking skills. Any assessment demonstrating the writing process augments the use of higher-level thinking skills. Discussions have been made to define the type of achievement the staff wants to assess, as well as the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students' achievement. It is recommended that the staff pursue further inquiry into developing schoolwide standards of measurement (rubrics) and implementing them across the curriculum.

In order for the desired results for student learning to have an impact upon all students, the development of schoolwide performance assessments is critical. The action plan lists the following two goals: (1) "Research existing DRSL assessment systems from other schools"; and (2) "Develop an evaluation tool that reflects student performance."

The timeline to accomplish the assessments of the DRSLs was stated as "winter 2005." However, in the Narrative Description of the Process of Defining Desired Results for Student Learning, the narrative stated that, starting back in the year 2000, DRSLs were being looked at within a rubric of being "reasonable, measurable and acceptable."

Based upon the action plan time frame, the goal to "Research existing DRSL assessment systems from other schools" will be completed by winter 2005; therefore, the actual measurement of Ephraim Middle School's DRSLs will not begin until sometime after the winter of 2005. If that is the baseline year for gathering data, the Visiting Team wonders how and what data Ephraim Middle School will be using to make decisions about student learning in the interval years. With NCLB and the publication of the results being made now, "School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance" needs to occur much sooner than 2005.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

Based upon interviews, it is clear to the Visiting Team that accommodations are made during assessments for students with IEPs. It is also evident that as teachers test what they teach (so long as it aligns with the State Core), the assessments are as fair and equitable as possible. Ephraim Middle School also provides remediation for students not yet meeting the core standard objectives. The Plato Lab and tutoring program are exceptionally beneficial to students needing additional help.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The Visiting Team commends the leadership of Ephraim Middle School for its clarity in setting a priority for student success. It has worked diligently to promote best practices and to provide teachers with the training and skills they need to work effectively with students. The leadership of the school, teachers as well as administrators, makes a concerted effort to allocate resources of time, money, and training to implement effective staff development. Teachers are encouraged to further their education and training, with multiple opportunities provided on site.

The school has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are supported. Inservices that promote reading and writing across all curriculum areas are in place for this coming year.

The Visiting Team commends the Ephraim Middle School Administration for the work it has done to develop leadership capacity within the school/community.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The Visiting Team recognizes and commends the leadership of the school for using data from CRT scores to adjust curricular focus toward reading and writing.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

Reading assessment is administered at the beginning of the school year, placing students according to their needs. CRT data is analyzed to determine areas of instruction that need emphasis. Discussions in team meetings reveal common patterns of effective instruction as well as areas needing reinforcement. All results are monitored by administrators and team leaders.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

Schoolwide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission. These are promoted through the student handbook, transition assemblies, newsletters, and day-to-day consistent management of the administration. The Visiting Team was impressed with the effective management and organization of the campus layout, which provides a smooth and safe transition for students from class to class without interference among grade levels.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

The school's leadership has procured grant monies to provide additional programs for students needing academic tutoring. The "Gear-Up" program and Plato Lab provide great support to students. Other grants used for science equipment have been secured as well. The school district provides additional support that enhances technology programs in the school. These programs support additional learning opportunities for the students at Ephraim Middle School. Further data needs to be supplied to verify that these efforts correctly align with the achievement of the DRSLs.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The student government takes responsibility for activities each month. Grade level teams have the latitude to guide curriculum decisions. The Community Council and PTA are allowed to have input regarding the direction of school programs. The school leadership collaborates with all stakeholders to ensure that decisions made for student achievement are agreeable to the school community.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team found positive and productive working relationships among teachers, students, staff, and administration. Teachers have a deep concern for students, and this concern manifests itself through respect that is observable during classroom visits.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

Observed within the school is much evidence of parents and families as partners of the learning process. The active Community Council and PTA, as well as involvement from the college in the community, reinforce the support for collaborative student learning.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Reading and writing inservice training is ongoing throughout the year for all faculty members. The majority of the staff belongs to the Middle School Association, where they attend conferences and receive professional development opportunities. The Visiting Team encourages this to continue as the school more fully implements the middle school concept across grade levels.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

By all appearances, the school exhibits productive change and continuous improvement through its own dynamics. The staff and leadership personify this attitude of school improvement, as brought out during the Visiting Team's interviews and classroom observations.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

These are not applicable to Ephraim Middle School. Most middle level schools are not members of NAAS, but are accredited by the Utah State Office of Education.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the schoolwide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

Action steps for the school improvement plan are partially aligned with the goals for improvement. Some of the action steps are based on validated, research-based strategies for improvement.

The timelines established for implementation of some of the action steps need to be adjusted. Appropriate baseline data is incomplete; therefore, documentation of student growth on the selected target goals for school improvement will be difficult to document.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, schoolwide and systemwide?*

During the interviews, the Visiting Team gathered enough information to see that there is a schoolwide commitment to the process of self-inspection and improvement. Ephraim Middle School is commended for this commitment to school improvement.

However, Ephraim Middle School's Native Description of the Process of Defining Desired Results for Student Learning states, "We also believe that everyone on the whole team has a vested interest in **at least one of these DRSLs**" (emphasis added).

The National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) book *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* mentions "the need for **all** those who have a stake in the success of the school to agree upon the broad areas of knowledge, skills, and understandings which students should be able to demonstrate when they exit from the highest grade in your school. Once identified, this shared vision for student learning can provide students, staff, parents and community with a clear sense of direction and unity for purpose in the education of students."

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?*

Since the school improvement plan will call for the investment of the talents and expertise of the entire staff to achieve the school's DRSLs, it was unclear to the Visiting Team, upon reviewing the action plan, how the entire school will be involved. The Visiting Team recognizes and commends Ephraim Middle School's identification of individuals and departments that will be responsible for implementing each of the action steps. However, the school should make every effort to broaden the opportunity to share in the responsibility for implementing the school's action plan, to the extent that all areas of the curriculum are involved.

In the action plan, there needs to be a shared commitment and responsibility across the school for achieving the desired results for student learning by defining specific connections to each curricular area. The schoolwide action plan for reading, as an example, lists inservice activities for English teachers only. Also,

the action plan does not specify what types of professional development activities will occur for all teachers that will enhance the teaching and learning of reading across the departmental areas. During the interview process, it was very apparent that all departments have the opportunity to participate in reading inservice. It needs to be clearly articulated in the action plan that accomplishment of the DRSLs is a schoolwide endeavor.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the Ephraim Middle School administration for the work it had done to develop leadership capacity within the school/community.
- The Visiting Team highly commends the entire Ephraim Middle School community for its support of the school improvement process, and the way the school/community members did not view it as a means to an end but as a dynamic process of continual improvement. The learning process, although difficult at times, yielded positive results.
- The school employs a variety of programs to support student learning in the regular classroom. Adult paraprofessionals assist teachers and students, reading and math tutors regularly work with students, after-school programs are provided for individual student help, and a part-time specialist is available to assist students of limited English ability. The Visiting Team observed effective use of paraprofessional help to assist struggling learners across all curricular areas.
- The Special Education Department is effective in tracking students and consulting and collaborating with teachers in all content areas to best meet the needs of students with special needs.
- The school has established a strong and positive academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are actively supported. There is a culture of high expectations for student and staff.
- Students and staff feel valued and important.
- The effective use of technology is growing across the curriculum.
- Student and staff accomplishments are recognized and celebrated. Reward systems provide public acknowledgment of outstanding performance.

- The Sixth Grade Team is fully functional in the implementation of the middle school philosophy.
- Instructional time at Ephraim Middle School as being valued, and the structure of learning time reflects this commitment on behalf of the staff.
- Parent involvement has increased over the last year.

Recommendations:

- Continue the emphasis on the middle school concept and build upon the good foundation that has been put into place at Ephraim Middle School.
- Solidify the relationship among the guiding schoolwide learning results, the specific expectations of instruction in each discipline, and the services provided by each of the school's programs.
- According to Ephraim Middle School's "Analysis of Student Learning Needs: Description of Students' Current Level of Achievement of the Desired Results for Their Learning," Ephraim Middle School recommends that "additional workshops and strategies would be very helpful" in the area of giving "teachers the tools for teaching using the different learning strategies." This recommendation was not found in the action plan, but should be included.
- There needs to be a shared commitment and responsibility across the school for achieving the desired results for student learning by defining specific connections to each curricular area. The Visiting Team, during the interview process, felt that all departments have the opportunity to participate in reading inservice. It needs to be clearly articulated in the action plan that accomplishment of the DRSLs is a schoolwide endeavor.
- Desired results for student learning and indicators of student achievement need to be more closely aligned. Rubrics need to be developed across curricular lines and grade levels so that there is a seamless transition.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school review each of the action steps according to the following standards: (1) Do the action steps outlined in the plan hold the greatest promise of achieving the objectives for improving student performance? (2) Do the action steps reflect research-based findings related to effective instructional practices and optimal organizational conditions to support student learning? For example, as listed under Schoolwide Action Plan #2, the action step to increase 7th and 8th grade Core testing scores by 10 percent is to "mail failure notices [home]." It is unclear whether this will result in the desired improvement in Core testing results, since in the rationale it specifically states, "failing notices increase after sixth grade." Also, test scores drop after sixth grade.

Therefore, failure notices have already been increased and scores have not been shown to improve, but to actually go down, according to the tests reported.

- The Visiting Team recommends that, in the future, Ephraim Middle School use the *Indicators of Schools of Quality* provided by the National Study of School Evaluation, which can serve as a research-based tool to assist Ephraim Middle School in conducting a more in-depth analysis of the school's instructional and organizational effectiveness according to a set of validated principles and indicators of high-performing systems of teaching and learning.
- The rubrics used in the NSSE survey describe a continuum of research-based principles and indicators that should be evident in the work of the school. Currently, Ephraim Middle School uses a self-reflective, narrative format for analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness, using 10 domain areas with no common researched-based rubrics on which to base valid and reliable judgments and data-driven decisions. For example, one item that was recommended for "Team Growth" was listed as "Deer Hunt Off." The Visiting Team was unclear as to how that would increase the focus on improving student performance.
- Under "Quality Instructional Design," the Ephraim Focus Group in charge of this area recommends "increased communication between departments to better enrich student learning." The Visiting Team concurs with their recommendation.